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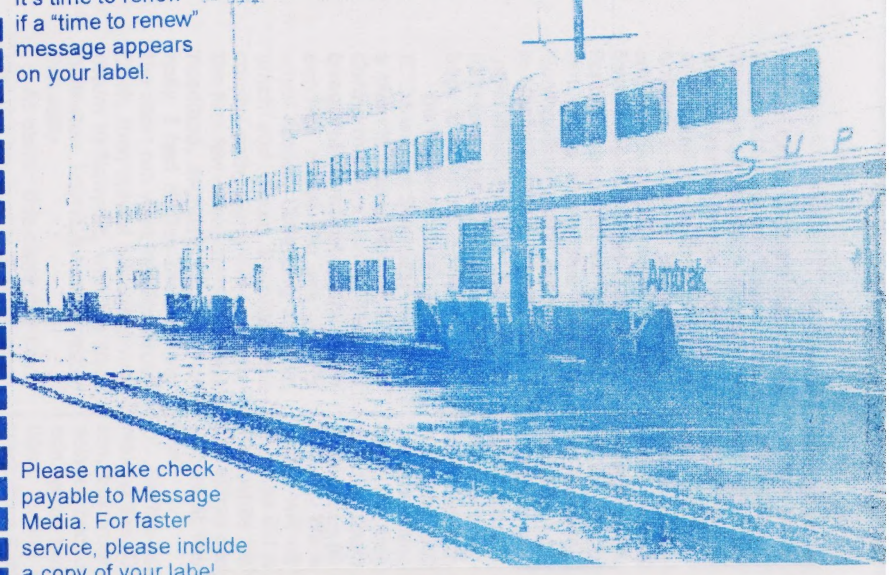

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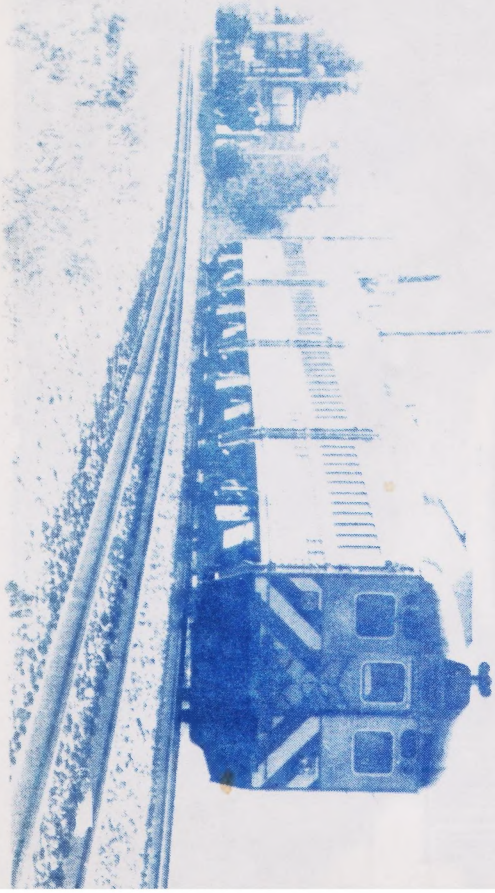

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#669
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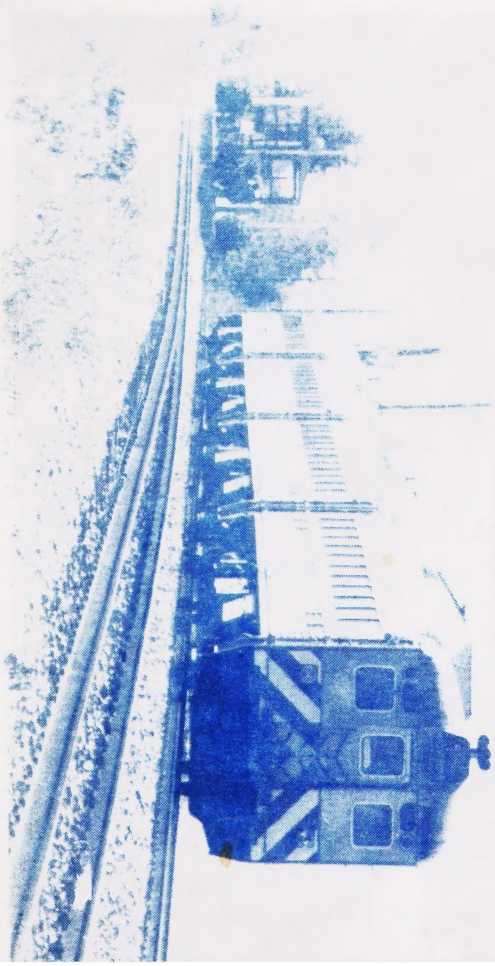

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RAIL TRAVEL NEWS

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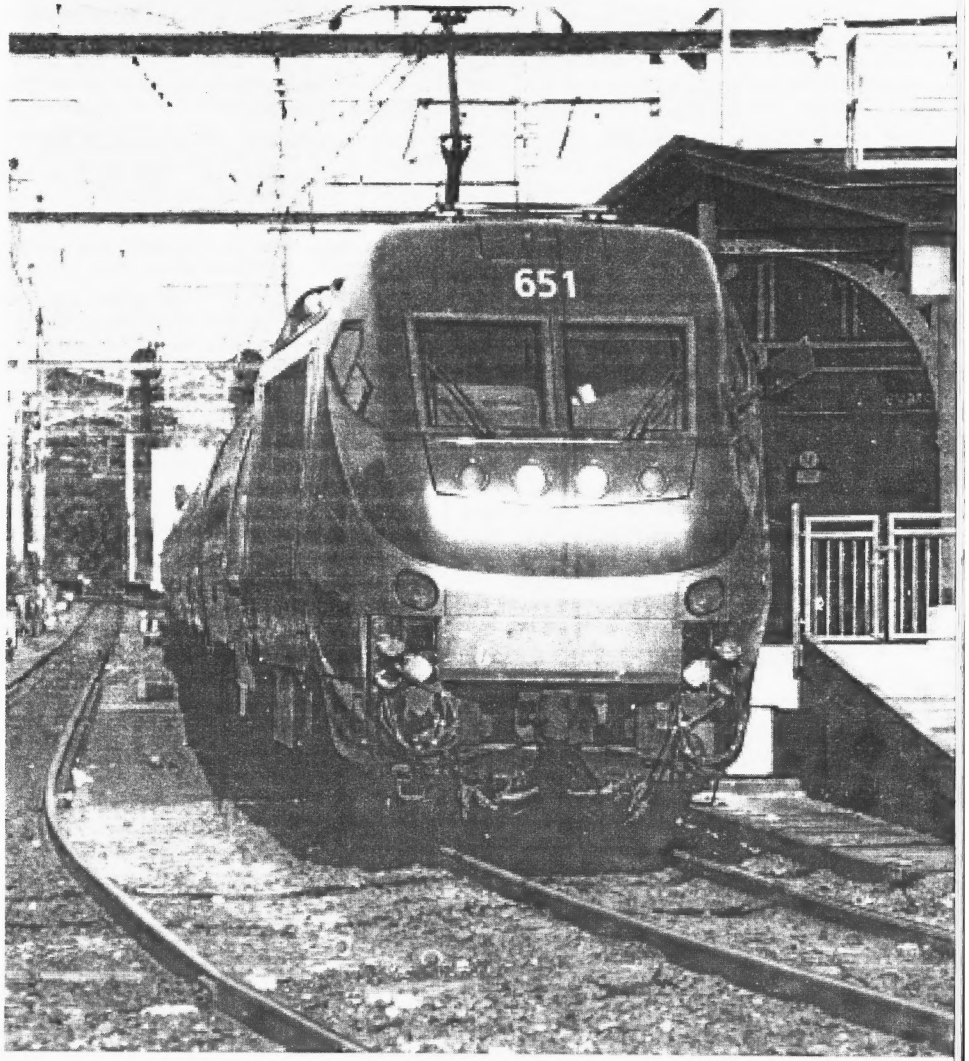

ON THE COVER

Amtrak Regional train 164 makes a stop at Wilmington DE on June 29, 2003. The train is powered by new HHP locomotive #651. The word "Amtrak", in red on a blu background, is not visible in the photo due to the sun's glare on the nose of the locomotive. Photo by Bill Hakkarinen.

New Jersey Transit's new River Line diesel-powered light rail pictured at the Aquarium station on the first weekend of service. Two mounted Camden police officers are seen with visitors to the station. Besides the NJ State Aquarium, the station is near the battleship USS New Jersey, a floating museum. Photo by James Thornton.

THE RIVER LINE

By James Thornton

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Fares range from 45 cents for a feeder fare for monthly commuter rail ticket users to $1.85 for riders to Camden who transfer to a bus for Philadelphia. The most-mentioned fare is the flat $1.10 fare for the full 34-mile length of the River Line or any stops in between, likely the cheapest such train ride in the US. It undercuts the $3.20 Camden-Trenton fare on parallel bus routes. The fare for a train ride and a transfer to a bus is $1.55. Transfer slips from buses are accepted as train fares. Reduced fares are available for children, seniors and disabled riders. Monthly commuter passes range from an $18 add-on for rail ticket holders to $58 for the light rail and transfer to Philadelphia. The light-rail-only monthly pass is $41, the same as a one-zone bus pass. All bus passes are honored on light rail, but no rail tickets or passes are accepted on NJT buses. Ticket machines are placed at all stations, with date and time validators, and ticketless riders are subject to fines of up to $100.

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The main equipment facility for the River Line's 20 cars is at 36th Street, and there is a two-track shed for trains in Trenton, just south of the station. Trenton's light-rail stop is separate from the NJT/Amtrak/SEPTA station, about a mile from the state capitol complex.

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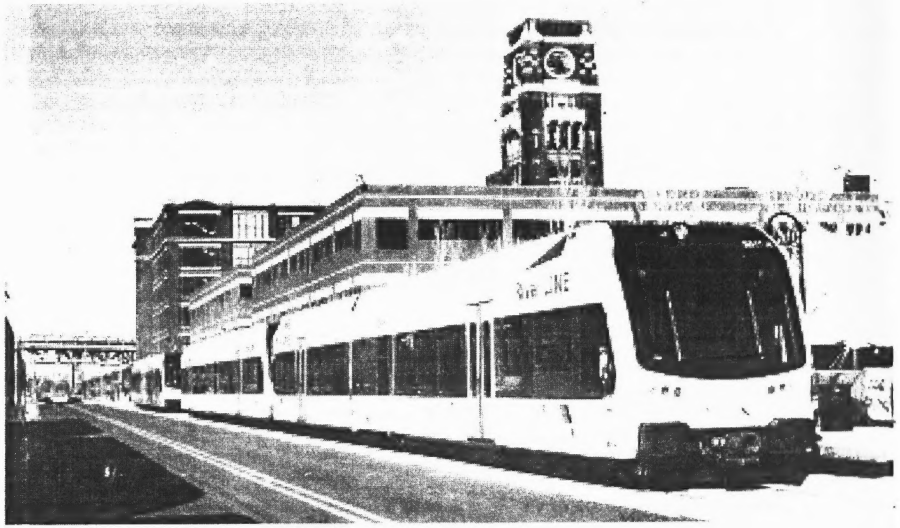
amount for health care and will receive $1000 signing-bonuses on ratification.

SEPTA's next big contract deadline is April 1 for UTU locals representing its suburban transit division. Meanwhile, SEPTA officials aired a possible 22% fare hike to close a projected $70 million budget gap created by rising costs and chronic state underfunding. Unlike in last year's proposals, no service cuts have been floated.—James Thornton.

FIRST RIDE ON THE RIVER LINE

By Theodore W. Scull

The 34-mile River Line opened for business on Sunday, Mar 14, carrying passengers along a 20-station route between the NE Corridor at Trenton and downtown and waterfront Camden, across from Philadelphia. Most of the route is an upgraded freight line, and the operation is smooth and impressive.



Five days after the opening, I went for a ride, connecting from the Upper East Side by bus and subway to Penn Station and the first off-peak NJ Transit train from Penn Station. Just after 9:15am there was but one NJT ticket seller in the main Amtrak/ NJT concourse and two in the new NJT section closer to 7th Avenue, and long lines. The ticket machines had shorter waits.

The well-patronized 9:37am left on time but then had door problems and poor timekeeping all the way to Trenton, arriving 15 mins late. Here I met a good friend who arrived on an equally lackadaisical SEPTA train from Market East. We walked the overhead concourse from the northbound side to the River Line station just across the street.

The two-car, diesel-powered LRV trains leave every half-hour Sunday to Friday from 6am to 9:05pm, with a similar schedule from Camden, the 34-mile end-point-to-endpoint ride taking 73mins. Saturdays have later running times. Ticket machines produce single rides at $1.10 one way (50 cents for 62 and older), monthly passes at $41, and various connecting fares. Tickets must be validated on the platform and are good for 2hrs. Fifteen-minute headways are planned.

The seating is very comfortable, and there are excellent views through the big side windows, not covered with ads, and both ahead and behind through the driver's compartment. The 11:30am departure had most seats filled at some point during the ride, which began by crossing the NE Corridor Line and joining the former PRR, now Conrail Shared Assets track. Freights seen were pulled by Conrail, CSX and NS engines, and except for the south end, operate mostly at night, resulting in no late-evening River Line trains, apart from Saturday night and within Camden.

Photo above: Special trains at Aquarium Station on Mar 13 ready for the grand opening of light rail. Photo by James Thornton.

The ride is an interesting one, mixing the rural, rivers and marshlands with suburban, small towns and industrial landscapes. The single and double track is smooth, with the trains having the right of way at nearly all level crossings, making for a delightfully continuous ride, unlike the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail operation. Some towns have speed restrictions, but the ride is never pokey, and the top speed is 60mph.

Joining the former Camden and Amboy Line at Bordentown, the line runs parallel to, though mostly out of sight of, US 130 and within sight of the Delaware River for short stretches. The vast, abandoned Roebling factory complex is a fascinating look at industrial architecture, and the station tiles reflect the past grandeur. In a contrast, US Pipe Company appeared to be quite active. Every high-level station has its own individual decorative features.

In Burlington, one of two towns worth getting off for, the line runs down the main street (Broad) and affords close-up views of the historic commercial buildings, resildences and churches. The line passes within a few hundred yards of the Burlington-Bristol Bridge toll booths and then becomes wooded and marshy to Riverside. Riverton is also worth a look, especially for the waterfront houses facing the Delaware. In the 1920s, my grandparents rented a summer house here when they lived in Center City, Philadelphia.

After Palmyra and a distant view of the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge, the River Line passes under the Atlantic City rail line, parallels the active CSAO freight tracks and Pavonia Yard, and enters Camden. It's mostly street running now with the Walter Rand Transportation Center the major stop in what is left of downtown Camden. The River Line interchanges here with the PATCO Hi-Speed Line with its station (Broadway) underground.

The tracks make a hook through Camden and then parallel the Delaware for the last short stretch to serve the Aquarium, the Tweeter Entertainment Center and the battleship USS New Jersey. Very little is left of the original industrial waterfront that once included Campbell Soup, RCA Victor, Standard Tank and Seat Company, Esterbrook Fountain Pen, Todd Shipbuilding and the William S. Scull Company (coffee, tea and peanut products). The former Victor Talking Machine Building is the only remaining industrial structure of architectural note, and it is to be converted into apartments.

After a walk along the waterfront promenade and Market Street, we boarded the PATCO Line at Broadway and rode over one of America's most devastated residential sections, then into bucolic Haddonfield to the Lindenwold end where the line interchanges with the NJT Atlantic City Line. We turned around and rode back, continuing over the Benjamin Franklin Bridge with its great views of Philadelphia and the riverfront to 8th and Market. After a late lunch at Pearl's Oyster Bar in the Reading Market and a purchase of two pounds of Amish pork scrapple, we had a walk through Center City to the start of the PATCO Line at 15th-16th and Locust.

I had planned to take SEPTA from Market East to Trenton, but instead wanted a second ride on the River Line, so boarded PATCO to Broadway, walked to the Tweeter Center Station and boarded the 5pm train there. Stopping at the Walter Rand Transportation Center 10mins later, our train picked up about 25 people connecting from PATCO. It was well-filled again, mostly dropping people off along the way to Trenton.

Nearly every station has free parking, from 25 spaces at Palmyra to 457 at the Pennsauken Route 73 Park & Ride and 625 at Florence US130 Park & Ride. I counted only 25 cars here at 5:53pm. What a contrast to the completely full, with insufficient spaces, facilities at Hamilton and Princeton Junction on the NEC Line.

The train arrived at Trenton one minute late at 6:14pm and I caught the 6:37 NJT NEC train back to New York, a much smoother operation and a 3-min early arrival (7:57pm) at NY Penn Station. I walked to the Lexington Avenue #6 at 33rd and Park and was home at 8:31pm with dinner on the table at 8:45pm after a most satisfying transit-riding day. The transit fares—NYCTA (2), NJT (2), PATCO (3) and River Line (2)—totaled substantially less than a one-way Amtrak NY-Philadelphia trip.

A mystery train has been added by Amtrak to run NY-New Haven with a stop at Stamford CT. According to Amtrak Bulletin Order #8-75 dated Mar 29, train 1164 is a Sunday-only run lv NY at 12:50pm, just ahead of Regional 164, stopping at Stamford at 1:34 and reaching New Haven at 2:22. Normally, Amtrak's 1000 series is used for Deadhead-No Passengers trains and a few holiday extras over the Thanksgiving weekend, indicating hired trains from the commuter lines like MARC, SEPTA, NJT and ConnDot. If it was a deadhead train, it wouldn't start at NYP. It could be an equipment move for New Haven-Springfield shuttle trains, but with paying passengers?—Jim Langan.

Tie replacement project on CSX between Savannah GA and Jacksonville FL will be underway Apr 25-Jun 23. The Silver Meteor, #97/98, won't run at all. Instead, cars will be added to the Silver Star, train 91/92, and its schedule will be significantly changed. Rail watchers have already dub-bed this train the Super Silver. It will leave NY 1:45 earlier, and northbd lv Miami 2hrs earlier. Stops will be added at Jesup GA & Okeechobee FL.

Train 89/90, the Palmetto, will keep its schedule but add a stop at Yemassee SC. Amtrak said some delay is possible to it and the Auto Train, which also keeps its schedule.

Two Clocker trains, nos. 627 & 628, were turned over to the NJ Transit effective Feb 21, to originate and terminate in Trenton instead of Philadelphia. Northbound riders from Pennsylvania now must use SEPTA but can make a cross-platform change from track 4 in Trenton to NJT train 3928, replacing Amtrak 628, leaving Trenton at 7:50am, 5mins later, making all the Amtrak stops plus Hamilton, Newark Airport and Secaucus Jct, arriving NYP at 9:04am, 11 mins later. The train was expanded to 10 cars from six, and turns at Trenton from a new southbound train 3815 on track 5, arriving Trenton at 7:27am. Amtrak 628 was also a 10-car Amfleet train.

NJT train 3999 replaces Amtrak 627, leaving NYP at 5:17pm, 2mins later than Amtrak, making the same stops as 627, arriving Trenton at 6:221pm, 9mins later. It also turns on track 5, which means that PA-bound riders must go to the southbd platform (2 escalators) to the "South High Track" for their SEPTA connections.

No. 3999 then turns to a new deadhead train (no passengers) no. X380, to return to NY's Sunnyside Yard, as the new Morrisville yard is still not in service yet. A new public timetable was issued by NJT for the NEC line.

Note that Amtrak nos. 627/628 turned to each other Mon-Fri at both 30th St and Sun-nyside Yards, so this change frees up 10 Amfleet cars for other Corridor services, and one ALP-46 engine no longer has to be leased.—Jim Langan.

Oil tanker truck crash in Bridgeport Ct Mar 25 heavily damaged some southbound I-95 lanes, forcing a lengthy closure of them with mammoth traffic disruption. Metro-North said it made service additions to accommodate extra riders in AM and PM peak periods. New Haven Line express and Amtrak trains expected to make additional stops if station crowding required it. Shore Line East service also was extended to make stops on the New Haven Line main line.

Metro-North said its on-time perf for the week ended Mar 28 was 98.7% systemwide.

Democratic & Republican conventions in the East this summer threaten to disrupt public transportation. The Demo convention meets July 26-29 in Boston and the Republican convention Aug 30-Sep 2 in NYC. Boston's North Station will be closed for the meeting starting July 23, and I-93 will be closed, since both are uncomfortably close to the FleetCenter meeting site.

Security officials want to close Penn Station during the NY meeting, but NY's mayor opposes the plan except for a short critical time period.

North Station closure would presumably disrupt Amtrak's Downeaster service as well.

Current Amtrak ads running in Massachusetts show the Acela heading north out of Boston's North Station, and lacking pantographs as well. An Amtrak spokesman explained that they don't necessarily have "technical accuracy."

Boston MBTA users will find the opening of the Logan International Airport station delayed a month, officials said Mar 30, because work is slower than planned. The North Station rebuild will then open next, a month after the airport station, ending the presence of elevated tracks in the city. A connection between the Green and Orange lines there will make subway riding more convenient. The next station upgrade after that will be the Red Line's Charles-MGH station in 2006.

Some Boston citizens are fighting the federal rule to take effect Dec 2004 requiring trains to blow horns at most crossings.

RAIL CANADA

Prime Minister Paul Martin on Mar 1 fired VIA Rail chairman Jean Pelletier, and a few days later VIA president Marc LeFrancois, because of VIA's alleged role in a complex financial scandal in which companies friendly to the Liberal Party received $100 million in commissions to which they weren't entitled. (Not all of that amount was VIA mondy.) There were mixed reactions among rail observers as to whether these changes would be beneficial to VIA.

Heavy February storms dumped three feet in the East. On Feb 19 VIA train 14, the Ocean, arrived in Halifax 6hrs, 40mins late, just before an 11pm curfew. It was held at Moncton NB 1.5hrs for a CN snow plow to precede it, pushed by two CN SD75 units. The train's consist at Montreal was engine 6407 (F40) & 6429 (F40 in lime green with white "telus" on sides); bag 8621, diner 8412, slprs 8211, 8206, 8203, 8228, 8215 & dome obs 8703.—Eric Hillyer.

VIA'S Vancouver Island Dayliner service was disrupted Apr 5 by a large fire on a 100-ft wooden trestle near Nanaimo BC. It began about 4pm, not long after the VIA train had crossed it, and after a freight has passed. It was believed that a spark from either train had set off the blaze, which destroyed the trestle and distorted some rails. VIA service continued, with a bus subbing on the norherly leg.

Amtrak's International will be discontinued with the Apr 26 timetable because of chronic disruptions due to border inspections. These have reduced international ridership. The train will be reduced to Chicago-Pt Huron MI and named the Blue Water. VIA pledged to continue its portion of the run, between Sarnia and Toronto, but it will not connect with the Blue Water. Amtrak/VIA trains 364/365/367 Chicago-Toronto will become 364/365 only. Michigan requested the Blue Water replacement train, and NARP has urged Amtrak to run a Thruway bus to Windsor from Dearborn or Detroit so a cross-border day trip is still possible.

Ottawa Transportation Committee on Mar 31 voted to study a proposed east-west light rail line between Kanata and Orleans. The 20-month study will cost $2 million.

MIDWEST REPORT

Reports from Chicago recently have been showing that Amtrak trains, especially the Lake Shore Limited, have been late in leaving their point of origin because of delays in readying the equipment. Amtrak was surely aware of this problem, and most recently there seems to have been improvement, leading to the belief that a crackdown occurred. MinnARP referred to the problem as "the chronic inability of the Chicago base to repair cars, clean them, and get trains spotted on a timely basis."

New light rail line from downtown Minneapolis to Ft. Snelling Park-and-Ride has had its opening delayed from the scheduled Apr 3 because of a bus drivers' strike that began Mar 4. Metro Transit is asking the FTA or permission to delay opening until Apr 2005, but hopes to open it later this year. If the strike becomes more prolonged, the date might be in Dec. At that time the second segment would be ready, and both could open at once.

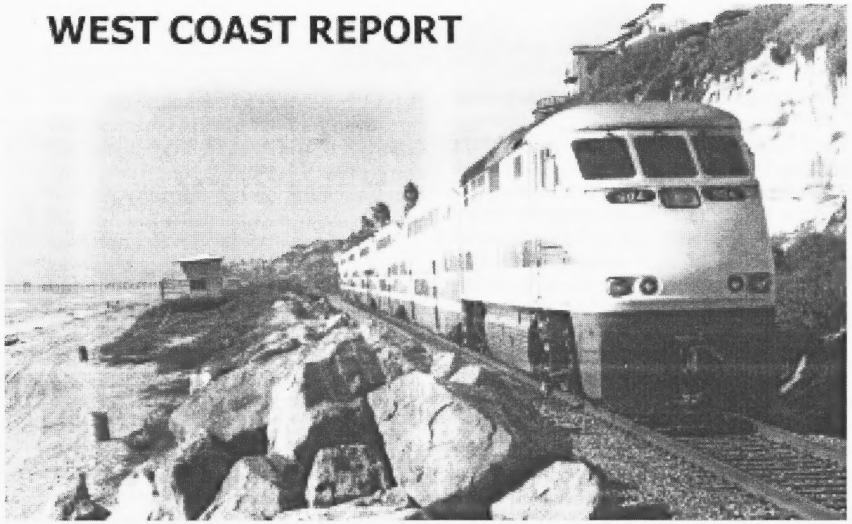
Meanwhile, a Minneapolis city council member is asking for a study of a possible Midtown Greenway streetcar line, a project estimated to cost $53 million. The Greenway is a hike-and-bike trail on a former rail line.

A weird problem among the many winter troubles at Amtrak's Chicago base this year happened Jan 23 when train 347, the Illinois Zephyr, was delayed 47mins leaving because of an engine problem on loco 141. It was found that a leaking pipe in the diesel shop steam plant had dripped water on the loco's intake air filters, which then froze and blocked cooling ducts.

One of Michigan's aims in wanting the Chicago-Toronto train cut back to Port Huron was to enable a day trip to Chicago by changing departure times.

South Bend-Chicago commuter service was disrupted, changed to bus most of the day Apr 10 after the first train out of South Bend derailed its equipment on the way to the station. Catenary was also damaged, leading to the heavy disruption. The two cars derailed and tipped 45 degrees for reasons not immediately known, and tracks between South Bend and Michigan City were closed down.

WEST COAST REPORT



A southbound Metrolink commuter train skirts the Pacific Ocean shoreline on BNSF's former Santa Fe Surf Line at San Clemente CA on Oct 10, 2002. Metrolink provides service between L.A. Union Station and Oceanside on this line. The train is powered by one of 12 EMD F59PHI diesels owned by Metrolink, and has five bilevel cars. Photo by Alex Mayes.

Seattle's Sounder commuter train service will have schedule changes Jun 7 to improve patronage by offering better departure times. The three Seattle-Tacoma round trips will have mostly earlier times. Ridership on this line has been good. However, the one round trip on the Seattle-Everett run, begun in Dec 2003, is seeing only half its projected ridership, and an earlier departure is planned to attract more riders. A second train might be added in 2005.

Seattle monorail agency, after 14 months of making route and station placement changes wanted by local interests, on Mar 29 approved the final route plan. The present plan is expected to cost $1.6 billion or about $150 million less than its original estimate.

Bay Area voters on Mar 2 approved a plan to raise tolls on most local bridges by $1 to finance a long list of transit and highway projects, collecting $125 million per year. Some of the major rail projects planned to benefit from the funds were: new San Francisco Caltrain extension to downtown, BART Transbay Tube seismic strengthening, BART Oakland Airport connector, expansion of Muni waterfront historic streetcars, Capitol corridor improvements, BART extension to Warm Springs, renovation of Dumbarton rail bridge for Caltrain to Eastbay, etc.

Now a month later the information comes that the federal highway bill now being worked on will not permit the bridge-toll money to be used to subsidize operations of local transit. Unless this facet of the federal bill is changed, the amounts available from bridge tolls will be much less than the $125 million per year projected.

Calif. High Speed Rail Authority is completing public hearings Apr 28 (in Fresno) on its draft environmental report and has extended the public comments period to Aug 31. There is no agreement yet on the route of the planned So. Cal. to No. Cal. train, at least in the Bay Area. Many rail advocates prefer a route paralleling I-580 via the Altamont Pass between the Bay Area and the Central Valley. Wrote advocate Rich Tolmach, "Altamont Pass is not some fringe alternative; it is the primary corridor for Bay Area-Central Valley and Bay Area-L.A. traffic. Altamont was also found to be the best route by the 1993 Cal-Speed UC Berkeley study and a contemporaneous independent French study. All indications are that it has the lowest cost, serves the most Californians and has the fewest potential environmental problems of all available routes."

City of Richmond will build a strong fence at a spot where UP and BNSF tracks converge to prevent more pedestrian deaths. A federal grant application to do so in 1998 failed, so the city will fund the project.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in late March gave final approval to granting $8 million to the North Coast Railway Authority for rebuilding the Northwestern Pacific Railroad's southern end, between Willits and Schellville, in southern Sonoma County. The line will have bridge, crossing signal and other repairs done to allow 25mph freight speed. Two railways, the Northwestern Pacific and the Sierra Northern (present owners of the Skunk Train operation) want to run freight on the southern line. Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit wants to initiate commuter rail service on the southern section, requiring an upgrade to 40mph freight and 60mph passenger operation. Parts of the line already have reached that level. Upgrading the northern section, to Eureka, would cost up to $100 million more, an amount out of the question given the state's present budget crisis.

Map at left shows southern NWP route. Courtesy NCRA.

Southern California Amtrak service is being disrupted at times between March and May for UP rail replacement. Pacific Surfliners: train 774 will originate in Goleta Mar 27-31, Apr 13-16 and Apr 23-May 1, with a bus San Luis Obispo to Santa Barbara, and train 775 will run only as far north as Santa Barbara Mar 26-30, Apr 12-15 and Apr 22-30, with a bus Santa Barbara to San Luis. The northbound Coast Starlight may have delays up to 30mins between Santa Barbara and San Luis on those days.

Amtrak and Metrolink have a "Rail 2 Rail" program north of L.A. that allows ticket holders of either railroad to use trains of either operator. Starting Apr 1 Amtrak and Coaster will try a 6-month experiment of the same program on those trains between San Diego and Oceanside.

California's Hi-Speed Rail project was to have a bond issue on the ballot next Nov, but the Governor wanted it delayed two years because of interference with other bonds planned to resolve the state financial crisis. But transportation leader Rod Diridon told the NARP meeting in Oakland Apr 3 that the decision will be made later. It might be on the Nov ballot, since the money from it won't be needed for a few years, and would not interfere with the other bonds.

Caltrain's Baby Bullet trains will begin operating Mon, June 7, the commuter agency said Apr 2. Five morning and five evening trains will run at 75mph top speed compared to 60 at present, making only express stops. Weekend service will also return; for two years buses have substituted on weekends during construction of new tracks and signals.

Fresno CA station, on the San Joaquin line, is being renovated and restored to original appearance. A groundbreaking happend Mar 23, and the project will be completed in the fall.

Whistling through Dixie by Rail

By Jack M. Turner

South Georgia was once a passenger train hotbed, as the Atlantic Coast Line, Central of Georgia and Southern Railway cross-crossed the region with exotic-sounding trains such as the City of Miami, South Wind, Dixie Flyer, Dixieland, Southland, Flamingo, Seminole, Royal Palm and Ponce de Leon, all of which ran at least into the late 1950s. Another unnamed service carried an Atlanta to Panama City FL sleeping car, while yet another anonymous train evolved into a connection for ACL's famed Champion.

A drive up today's Interstate 75 would intersect most of these routes. At Valdosta one would find the ACL's Jacksonville-Thomasville-Montgomery-Birmingham line that linked the South with Chicago. Southern's Jacksonville to Atlanta main line also served Valdosta and continued northward through Tifton and Cordele. At Tifton one would encounter the Southern main again along with ACL's Jacksonville-Albany line, which connected with the Central of Georgia line to Columbus and Birmingham that then connected with the Illinois Central iron to Chicago and St. Louis.

A bit farther north, at Cordele, the Southern line met yet another ACL route, the AB&C line that saw passenger service between Jacksonville and the upper Midwest via Atlanta. Only the Panama City to Atlanta train, which traveled along the CofG via Albany, and ACL's Southland, which took a cutoff from Thomasville to St. Petersburg via Perry FL, did not intersect the route of today's I-75.

Thus it came to be in the 1950s and '60s that Valdosta, Tifton, Albany and Cordele each could rightfully claim to be the heart of the region's passenger train network. However, of these four communities, only Cordele could lay claim to hosting a third major railroad, as a Seaboard line known as the SAM Shortline bisected the town, paralleling the ACL route through town from east to west.

The SAM Shortline was so named as it linked Savannah, Americus and Montgomery. The line was originally built in the late 1880s and became part of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad in 1900. The line hosted a minor passenger service known to various locals as the Shoo Fly, Dummy or Butthead until 1951. The unusual nicknames were inspired by the odd-looking rail motorcars that handled passengers and mail. The SAM Shortline route survived the many mergers that eventually resulted in the formation of the CSX company. In 1989 the line was spun off to RailTex affiliate Georgia Southwestern Railroad, which in turn sold the line to the State of Georgia in late 1999. A group of investors was soon found to operate the line under the name Heart of Georgia Railroad. The line today employs the operating marks HOG and its locomotives bear a decal of a red hog (that resembles the Seaboard's old Razorback piggyback logo) on the side of each engine's nose.

Passenger service was returned to the Cordele to Plains segment of the route in late 2002 in the form of an excursion train primarily using former MARC commuter coaches acquired from the Maryland commuter agency, augmented by a power car, a concession car, and a former Florida East Coast observation car. Former President Jimmy Carter, a resident of Plains, was a key player in starting up the service and lent his fame by posing aboard an SAM Shortline locomotive for the line's brochures and Web site. To date, the service has exceeded the expectations of everyone involved and has led to the addition of occasional forays eastward to points such as Vidalia and Abbeville for local festivals.

An April 19, 2003 ride aboard the SAM Shortline train provided this writer with a chance to experience Southern hospitality at its best. Conductor Lee Kinnamon, dressed in a classic conductor's uniform, welcomed about 100 passengers on board at Cordele as a northbound CSX freight ambled by on its parallel line through town. We later learned that this was a very light load for this run, likely due to the Easter weekend. My family and I found seats in the rear of the observation car and settled in for the 10am departure of the Archery Explorer.

Round-end observation car "Samuel Hawkins" entered service in 1939 as FEC "Bay Biscayne" and was one of that line's contributions to the Champion equipment pool. After a labor strike ended most of FEC's passenger service, the car was sold to the SAL and ACL. Unfortunately, the SCL added a disphragm and a taller end door to the round end to allow midtrain use on the Silver Star.

In 1971 the car gravitatted to Amtrak and was renumbered 3339. After retirement from Amtrak, the car eventually found its way to the Stone Mountain Railroad outside Atlanta and subsequently was acquired for the SAM Shortline operation.

The interior of the observation car has been upgraded with wood paneling that evokes scenes of a bygone era. The inviting lounge chairs and sofa seating of the FEC and Seaboard era are gone, replaced by comfortable movable chairs paired at tables for two. The return of the Seaboard-style seats, removal of the diaphragm and reinstallation of a traditional observation car end door are on the line's future wish list.

Our train passed through a small cypress swamp and paused at its first stop, Georgia Veterans State Park, at 10:30am. Long before this stop, our volunteer car host, Jack Windham, stopped by to welcome us aboard and serve trays of Georgia peanuts and other tasty snacks. These are provided gratis to first class passengers who pay $10 extra to ride in the observation car. Like every crew member we met, Mr. Windham displayed a warmth associated with the region that rightfully earns Georgians a hospitality award. When asked about his involvement with the excursion train, Mr. Windham told me that when he retired a few years ago he decided he would like to give something back to his hometown, Cordele, which had been so good to him.

Just west of the state park, the Archery Explorer crossed massive Lake Blackshear on a long causeway with a trestle in the middle. As we made our way westward, we passed through scenic pecan groves, passed through a few more small cypress swamps, and caught a glimpse of several small towns that are provided flagstop status by the passeger train. At 11:35 we made our scheduled stop in Aamericus, where an old Seaboard yard today houses spare excursion train coaches, as well as freight locomotives bearing Grand Trunk and Canadian National livery. Just west of town, the former Central of Georgia line linking Albany, Columbus and Birminghamcould be seen in a cut below the SAM Shortline.

A one-hour stop in Plains began at noon, allowing time to roam the small hamlet, have a bite to eat, and take a look at Billy Carter's old gas station. During the stop, one of our two GP9m engines was moved to the rear of the train to serve as power for the return trip to Cordele.

Before the return run began, we would travel three miles further west to Archery, the childhood home of Jimmy Carter. There the train would stop in a rural area across a road from the former President's boyhood farm, which now is a national monument. Passengers were free to spend the hour-long stop exploring the nicely restored Carter home, barn, farmlands and an old sharecropper's home. A few passengers elected to remain in Plains to catch the return trip to Cordele; however, they missed an enjoyable experience.

After an hour at Archery, the train departed, heading back eastward, now powered by the GP9m coupled to the observation car. A few minutes later, the train made a brief stop in Plains to pick up those who had opted to stay in the town for another hour.

The stop at Plains was followed by stops at Americus, Leslie and Georgia Veterans Memorial Park. The trip back to Cordele was very laid-back and restful. Passengers observed the springtime scenery, took short rests, and talked. Every once in a while Mr. Kinnamon, our conductor, would pay a visit, during which he displayed his SAM Shortline antiques and informed us about the passing scenery or the history of the rail line.

After a pleasant day aboard the train, we arrived back in Cordele at 4:40pm, ending a wonderful experience. The SAM Shortline is definitely a line that anyone with a free weekend might want to ride. The excursion is not just for the railfan, but is something the whole family will enjoy.

SAM Shortline excursion trains run on regular weekend schedules during much of the year. Trips originate at cordele but normally operate as far as Archery only once per week. Special rare-mileage trips occasionally run

east of Cordele, usually in conjunction with spring or fall festivals and other special events. Operating information may be found online at www.samshortline.com or by calling 800-864-7275. The closest Amtrak stops to Cordele are Tallahassee, two hours to the south, and Atlanta, 2.5 hours north. Numerous chain motels may be found in Cordele and 30mins south in Tifton, where a working farmstead known as Agarama hosts a short steam-powered logging train ride. The Courtyard by Marriott in Tifton is especially convenient, as it is within one mile of both Agarama and the busy Norfolk Southern freight line and is an easy drive from north and central Florida.

Two weeks after our SAM Shortline trip, another south Georgia short line hosted a rare-mileage trip from Smithville GA to Eufala AL. We boarded Georgia Southwestern's special for a 9:05am departure for Eufala along with about 165 other rare-mileage collectors. Our consist this trip would include GSWR's former MARC coach 109, former Amtrak "Le Pub" 3101, and GSWR parlor car 2002, a former Long Island Rail Road commuter coach that has been outfitted with comfortable lounge seats, a mid-car oak bar, and an open observation platform. Powering the train were GSWR's two FP9 locomotives, 6308 and 6302, which were purchased from VIA Rail Canada. At the throttle was GSWR President Dave Smoot, a third generation railroader and avid railfan.

The trip was one of the weekend's many activities jointly sponsored by the Central of Georgia and ACL-SAL historical societies. The trip originated at the GSWR yard in Smithville, a 30min drive north of Albany, where participants stayed. The GSWR line to Eufala formerly belonged to the Central of Georgia Railway and was served by an Albany GA to Montgomery AL coach train until 1951. The CofG network extended north from Albany to Smithville, where the Eufala/Montgomery line split from the line to Americus, which then divided into lines to Columbus and Macon/Atlanta. The small town of Smithville thus saw passenger trains such as the City of Miami, Seminole, Flamingo, Southland, Dixie Flyer, and the nameless Panama City to Atlanta and Albany to Montgomery trains pass during the 1950s. A few of these even stopped at the Smithville depot, located at the junction of the two lines. Today the GSWR operates freight service on the GSWR's line to Columbus via trackage rights over the Norfolk Southern between Smithville and Americus. The Smithville-Columbus route was traversed by the Illinois Central's beautiful City of Miami until 1971.

The first hour of our trip passed through slightly rolling terrain as we moved through piney woods and small towns such as Ironwood and Dawson. We were pleased by the clear skies that greeted us, as the previous day had found GSWR freight service to Columbus delayed by downed trees at several points as a result of a Saturday night storm. A half hour stop in Shellman allowed riders the option of detraining for a well-staged photo runby.

The red Georgia clay, more pine forests and small towns lines the rails as we continued westward through Cuthbert. The leisurely 30mph pace was ideal for socializing with fellow passengers, partaking of snacks and box lunches available on board, and gazing at the rails from the rear observation platform.

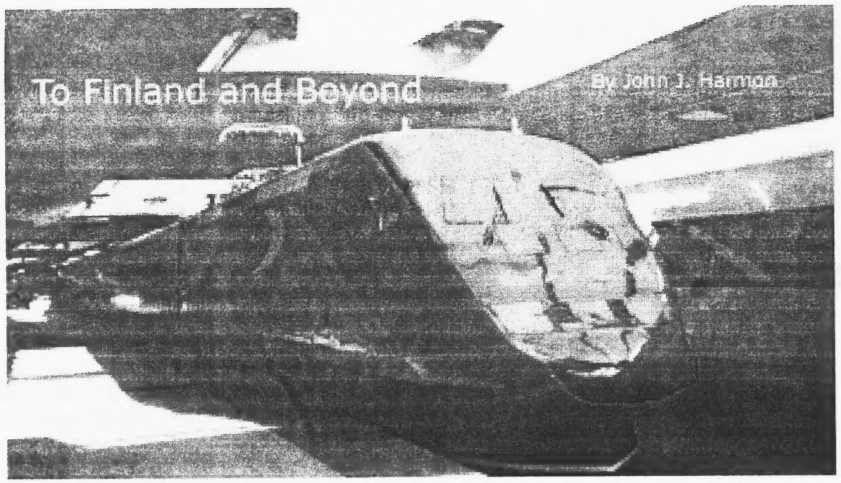
At 12:30pm we began a scenic crossing of the Chattahoochee River/Lake Eufala on a long trestle which made a spectacular vista from the rear platform. Several fishermen enjoying a Sunday on the lake gave surprised looks at the passenger train on this rural line. Soon the train backed down a wye to the old Eufala depot and came to a stop within a couple of turns of the wheels from the end of track at 12:47pm.

The 20min stop in Eufala provided a chance to photograph the FP9s, which have been repainted in a livery similar to the old Central of Georgia's. The lounge and parlor cars have been painted to match the locomotives, while the coach still wears MARC colors. The passenger cars are mainly used for shipper specials and other charter trips, while the F units see occasional use in freight service. The equipment is housed in Smithville along with a stable of freight engines in various paint schemes.

The return trip left Eufala at 1:10pm and paused a few miles east of the river in Georgetown for another photo runby. Back on board, we talked rail with riders from Ft. Lauderdale, Tallahassee, Atlanta and a variety of other Southern cities. We reached Smithville at 4:30, said our farewells, and began the 2-hour drive home armed with memories of some excellent south Georgia railroading.

To Finland and Beyond

By John J. Harmon



Swedish Linx train at Goteborg, Sweden on Aug 11, 2003. Photos by author.

On a bright Sunday morning in early August I emerge from the Helsinki airport in search of a taxi to take me downtown. I'm a bit bleary-eyed, as it's been a long overnight flight from Newark to Stockholm, then a connection over to Helsinki. Finland uses Euros for currency these days, and I use the time at the layover to purchase some Euros.

A friend will be coming in on a later flight, and together we'll spend the next week exploring Finland by rail. We've agreed to meet at the main railway station in Helsinki in time to catch an early afternoon train out to Hanko, on the south coast. I have some extra time, so after stowing my bag in a nearby hotel, I head for the nearest Metro station, which happens to be the stop for the railway station as well.

The Metro is quite modern and fast, and provides a very smooth ride out to the eastern suburbs. I purchase a ticket for three Euros, and find that it is good for an hour and a half, with no restriction on round trips. The line has two branches out to the east, and even on a Sunday afternoon trains run every seven minutes or so. I am able to ride the entire system in just under an hour and a half.

After grabbing a quick lunch at a station kiosk, I head out to the track where our train for Hanko is waiting, and find my friend waiting for me on a bench. Our train is actually headed for Turku, a port city on the southwest coast, and we will have to change at Karjaa. This train consists of four new double-decker coaches, all labeled for second class, and we don't find them particularly comfortable. The timetable promises a restaurant car, but it is noticeable by its absence. Maybe consists are different on a Sunday.

The connecting train to Hanko consists of two conventional second-class coaches pulled by a small diesel road switcher. The coaches were obviously built under license to Germany, as they look identical to the hundreds of their counterparts roaming around the branch lines of that country.

The four-hour round trip does without incident, and we return to our hotel for some supper in the hotel dining room (very good) and an early bed, as we have an early start planned for Monday morning.

The 6:34am train is headed for Joensuu, in eastern Finland, via Kouvola. The train has a first-class coach, restaurant car and five second-class coaches. We both have first-class rail passes, so we board the rear car, and find that the car is divided into two sections. There are traditional compartments such as those found in most European trains 20-30 years ago in one half of the car, while the other half consists of open seating. Seats are permanently fixed so that half face in one direction and half in the other. We learn that many Finnish trains reverse direction

Finnish Pendolino train at Oulu, Finland on Aug 10, 2003.

in mid-route, which explains the seating arrangement. While one can reserve specific seats on Finnish trains, we saw where we wanted to and had to move only once during our entire trip.

The restaurant car is staffed by a single attendant, and effectively is a cafe lounge, despite the knife and fork symbol shown in the timetable. We did find a couple of trains where full meals were being served, and these could be recognized by the presence of one or two extra attendants. But the single attendant cafe lounge appeared to be the rule.

The line is double-track to Kouvola, where we are held 15mins for a late connection from Pieksamaki. This would prove to be the latest we would run on any Finnish train, with most arriving within 5mins of the advertised time.

We leave the train at Parikkala, which is within a couple of miles of the Russian border. Our three-car local for Savonlinna is waiting. This branch-line train runs at impressive speeds, which we timed at about 75mph in spots. At one point there was a heavy brake application and a slight thud. A glance out the window reveals a cow rolling down the embankment. There was no damage to the train, though, and we continued on without delay.

My friend and I part company for the next 24 hours, as he will take a bus to Pieksamaki, connecting to a train which ultimately will take him to the west coast cities of Vassa and Pori. I've been to Pori on an earlier trip, and want to go up to Nurmes, further north in eastern Finland.

I backtrack to Parikkala, where I catch the next Intercity train to Joensuu, connecting there with a regional train to Nurmes. My hotel is a couple of miles out of town, and no taxis are evident, so I walk toward the center of the small town, where I see a taxi stand, but no taxis.

There are five of us, and the taxi that shows up is designed to hold three people besides the driver. But we all pile in, with the wife of one of them sitting on my lap.

Very few people in this part of Finland speak English, and I am concerned about being able to arrange for a taxi in the morning, as a have a 7am train to catch. But the desk clerk at the hotel understands what I need and assures me she'll take care of it.

Right on time, the taxi arrives at 6:30. The driver is the same one as last night, but this time he has a station wagon. Of course, I am the only passenger!

We arrive at the station to find a police investigation going on. Apparently the train has been attacked by vandals overnight, and they have sprayed graffiti on the side of the train away from the station. However, our departure for Joensuu is on time. We're delayed at one point by a northbound freight consisting of 34 cars of logs. There is a large wood-processing plant on the line, and it appears that most of the logging activity in eastern Finland is destined for this plant, which produces newsprint, wallboard and related wood products.

Having found no coffee this morning, I resolve to find some upon arrival in Joensuu, where I have three hours between trains. There is no kiosk in the station, so I walk a few blocks across the river into town, where I find a small restaurant open for breakfast. I learn that most fast food restaurants in Finland, including McDonalds, so not open until about 11am. I stroll through an open-air flea market and then have an early lunch at a Hesburger's (similar to McDonalds). They actually put a (small) amount of ice in their soft drinks, which makes them particularly attractive to an American visitor.

About noon I take another regional train to Pieksamaki, which is a major railhead with rail lines radiating in all directions. I'll head south on an Intercity train to Kotka, a port city on the south coast. Our train is a two-car electric multiple-unit set of the type used by commuters into Helsinki.

Our plan is to have dinner during the layover at Kotka, but Mother Nature has other plans for us, as the skies open up just as we arrive. So we decide to stay put during the layover and take our chances on the connecting Intercity train back to Helsinki. Needless to say, as departure time approaches, the skies clear up nicely. We learn to expect a heavy shower almost daily in the late afternoon or early evening.

The Restaurant Car on the Intercity train to Helsinki is once again operating as a cafe lounge. We ask about hot meals, and are directed to a menu on the wall. I select the lasagna, which is surprisingly good, especially when washed down with a large glass of draft beer, which is available in all Finnish Restaurant Cars.

Wednesday morning finds us back at the main station in Helsinki. We'll head west again, but this time will continue all the way to Turku. Our train on track 11 is a sleek new Pendolino, for which Finnish Railways (VR) charges an extra fare. The train is an immediate disappointment. The seat pitch in first class is about what you would expect in a typical Amfleet coach, although seating is 2-1. Seat backs are high and the windows are narrow (although not as bad as Amfleet), so viewing out the opposite side of the train is restricted. Worst of all is the fact that the seats are uncomfortable, with a ridge that hits you right at mid-thigh.

Coffee, tea and water are available free of charge. The train is fast, running at speeds over 110mph, which is remarkable on a single-track curving line. The tilting capability of the Pendolino is evident on sharp reverse curves west of Salo.

The Restaurant Car appears quite comfortable, with seating at both tables and counters. The menu appears to be identical to that we've seen in traditional restaurant cars.

At Turku we have an easy connection to a cross-country train to Pieksamaki via Tampere, where the train reverses direction. We have no problem changing seats so as to continue riding facing forward. Lunch in the Restaurant Car consists of a pizza and beer.

Another change of trains at Pieksamaki puts us on a train to Oulu, the northern capital of Finland. The train goes the long way around, via Kontiomaki, while my traveling companion gets off at Lisalmi to ride a local to Ylivieska, connecting there so an Intercity train to Oulu, where he will arrive 10mins before I do. I rack up over 550 new miles today, the best I'll do any day in Finland.

Today is our day to ride the Aurora Borealis to Kolari. The wakeup call comes at 5;15, and the hotel has arranged an early breakfast for us in the lobby. Our train is an overnight train from Helsinki which runs tri-weekly during the summer, and more frequently during the winter. The train is already in the station when we arrive, and the electric locomotive has been changed to a diesel. The consist of the train is five second-class sleepers, two second-class coaches, a Restaurant Car, and three car carriers. The trip up to Kolari will take 3hrs, 15mins, and we will end up about 75 miles north of the Arctic Circle, our northernmost point on the trip. We will run parallel to the Tornealv River, which forms the boundary between Finland and Sweden.

We have eight hours to explore the scenic delights of Kolari, which turns out to be about four miles away from the station. We hike into town, looking for a place to have lunch, but find that it makes Churchill, Manitoba look like a thriving metropolis. The only restaurant, a pizzeria, is closed for vacation. We do find a bank, which changes some money for us, although neither of the tellers speaks any English. We then return to the station, where we have some lunch at the small station cafeteria.

We spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing in the station waiting room, awaiting the southbound departure of the Aurora Borealis, which we will take as far as Kemi, where we'll stay overnight.

We're up early again on Friday, as the train to Kemijarvie, again above the Arctic Circle, leaves at 6:20. The rain showers come early today, and we need umbrellas for the walk to the station.

The Santa Claus Express is an impressive train, which runs daily throughout the year from Helsinki to Kemijarvie. There are 10 Second Class sleepers, a baggage car, Restaurant Car, two Second Class coaches, and four car carriers. About half the sleepers are taken off at Rovaniemi, a regional city about half way between Kemi and Kemijarvie. An electrification project is nearly complete except in the station area.

Finnish Pendolino train at Oulu, Finland on Aug 10, 2003.

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Having found no coffee this morning, I resolve to find some upon arrival in Joensuu, where I have three hours between trains. There is no kiosk in the station, so I walk a few blocks across the river into town, where I find a small restaurant open for breakfast. I learn that most fast food restaurants in Finland, including McDonalds, so not open until about 11am. I stroll through an open-air flea market and then have an early lunch at a Hesburger's (similar to McDonalds). They actually put a (small) amount of ice in their soft drinks, which makes them particularly attractive to an American visitor.

About noon I take another regional train to Pieksamaki, which is a major railhead with rail lines radiating in all directions. I'll head south on an Intercity train to Kotka, a port city on the south coast. Our train is a two-car electric multiple-unit set of the type used by commuters into Helsinki.

Our plan is to have dinner during the layover at Kotka, but Mother Nature has other plans for us, as the skies open up just as we arrive. So we decide to stay put during the layover and take our chances on the connecting Intercity train back to Helsinki. Needless to say, as departure time approaches, the skies clear up nicely. We learn to expect a heavy shower almost daily in the late afternoon or early evening.

The Restaurant Car on the Intercity train to Helsinki is once again operating as a cafe lounge. We ask about hot meals, and are directed to a menu on the wall. I select the lasagna, which is surprisingly good, especially when washed down with a large glass of draft beer, which is available in all Finnish Restaurant Cars.

Wednesday morning finds us back at the main station in Helsinki. We'll head west again, but this time will continue all the way to Turku. Our train on track 11 is a sleek new Pendolino, for which Finnish Railways (VR) charges an extra fare. The train is an immediate disappointment. The seat pitch in first class is about what you would expect in a typical Amfleet coach, although seating is 2-1. Seat backs are high and the windows are narrow (although not as bad as Amfleet), so viewing out the opposite side of the train is restricted. Worst of all is the fact that the seats are uncomfortable, with a ridge that hits you right at mid-thigh.

Coffee, tea and water are available free of charge. The train is fast, running at speeds over 110mph, which is remarkable on a single-track curving line. The tilting capability of the Pendolino is evident on sharp reverse curves west of Salo.

The Restaurant Car appears quite comfortable, with seating at both tables and counters. The menu appears to be identical to that we've seen in traditional restaurant cars.

At Turku we have an easy connection to a cross-country train to Pieksamaki via Tampere, where the train reverses direction. We have no problem changing seats so as to continue riding facing forward. Lunch in the Restaurant Car consists of a pizza and beer.

Another change of trains at Pieksamaki puts us on a train to Oulu, the northern capital of Finland. The train goes the long way around, via Kontiomaki, while my traveling companion gets off at Lisalmi to ride a local to Ylivieska, connecting there so an Intercity train to Oulu, where he will arrive 10mins before I do. I rack up over 550 new miles today, the best I'll do any day in Finland.

Today is our day to ride the Aurora Borealis to Kolari. The wakeup call comes at 5;15, and the hotel has arranged an early breakfast for us in the lobby. Our train is an overnight train from Helsinki which runs tri-weekly during the summer, and more frequently during the winter. The train is already in the station when we arrive, and the electric locomotive has been changed to a diesel. The consist of the train is five second-class sleepers, two second-class coaches, a Restaurant Car, and three car carriers. The trip up to Kolari will take 3hrs, 15mins, and we will end up about 75 miles north of the Arctic Circle, our northernmost point on the trip. We will run parallel to the Tornealv River, which forms the boundary between Finland and Sweden.

We have eight hours to explore the scenic delights of Kolari, which turns out to be about four miles away from the station. We hike into town, looking for a place to have lunch, but find that it makes Churchill, Manitoba look like a thriving metropolis. The only restaurant, a pizzeria, is closed for vacation. We do find a bank, which changes some money for us, although neither of the tellers speaks any English. We then return to the station, where we have some lunch at the small station cafeteria.

We spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing in the station waiting room, awaiting the southbound departure of the Aurora Borealis, which we will take as far as Kemi, where we'll stay overnight.

We're up early again on Friday, as the train to Kemijarvie, again above the Arctic Circle, leaves at 6:20. The rain showers come early today, and we need umbrellas for the walk to the station.

The Santa Claus Express is an impressive train, which runs daily throughout the year from Helsinki to Kemijarvie. There are 10 Second Class sleepers, a baggage car, Restaurant Car, two Second Class coaches, and four car carriers. About half the sleepers are taken off at Rovaniemi, a regional city about half way between Kemi and Kemijarvie. An electrification project is nearly complete except in the station area.

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(To be concluded next issue)

12 Months of Training 2003

By Theodore W. Scull

January-March: Because of foot surgery, I was laid up at home and didn't do any rail travel until April.

April: On trips into London from Berkshire, I have given up on the slow service from Windsor & Eton Riverside and have friends drop me on their way to work at Slough for Paddington. Slough has more frequent and much faster service, and also offers the thrill of seeing the InterCity 125s and Adelante stock race through at speed. Several of my day trips involve a day visit to Gravesend in Kent, and I delight in walking various routes from Paddington, with its wonderfully restored I.K. Brunel train shed and much restored Paddington Hilton, to Charing Cross via Hyde Park and the West End or through St. James Park. The walk from station to station takes about an hour, with the rainy weather alternative being the Circle Line, London's least reliable Underground Line. Signals failed twice on the days I wanted to ride.

I have been taking the Charing Cross to Gravesend route for 40 years, and while there is now a bit more frequency, the train service, even with new coaching stock replacing the delightful slam door carriages, is slow and spotty with delays for multiple reasons the norm. On the latest journey, the train was a half-hour late on a 50min run with no explanation given.

A few miles west of Gravesend at Ebbsfleet, major Eurostar high-speed line construction into St. Pancras is well underway with a connection in place between the high-speed and local Kentish lines that will eventually allow a much faster commute for some Southeast stations. On the return journey from Gravesend, a train on the up line had an electrical fire, so all third-rail power was off for half an hour. A stopping train pulled into Gravesend, but was terminated 15mins later at Dartford, and I had to change for one to Cannon Street instead of Charing Cross. A routine round trip became anything but.

May: During a six-day cruise that called at Bermuda, my wife and I spent the day walking the Bermuda Railway Trail. The line, garnering the dubious reputation as the British Empire's most expensive to build on a per-mile basis, closed down after World War II. Nearly the entire original route is now a cycling and hiking path. We bought a day bus pass and walked a scenic stretch from Somerset halfway to Hamilton. The flower-bedecked line affords high-up views of the harbor, cuts through hills and residential neighborhoods and passes a few of the original stations. The only stretch yet to do is from Hamilton to St. George.

June: On a fine weekend day in New York, we boarded the N Train at 59th and Lexington for the long, slow underground ride out to Sunset Park for an organized hike through Bay Ridge to Coney Island. The walk skirts leafy Greenwood Cemetary, passes through a lively Hispanic commercial strip, then three blocks up the hill through a parallel Asian, most Chinese, neighborhood. The route passes over the deep cut of Bay Ridge freight line, linking to the Cross Harbor Railroad over to Greenville, New Jersey, and the line used to bring newly-built subway cars from barges into the Transit Authority system. From Bay Ridge, the shore path follows the Narrows under the Verrazano Bridge, then along Gravesend Bay to Coney Island. The Stillwell Avenue subway station, the terminus for multiple lines from Manhattan, is being heavily rebuilt and only the W trains come directly into the platforms now. We walked the Boardwalk to Brighton Beach and took the Q from its temporary terminus back to Manhattan, first on an elevated section, then a former steam railway alignment and finally into the Transit Authority tunnels.

July: During a northern European cruise, Crystal Cruises chartered a train to operate from alongside the ship at Warnemunde (near Rostock) in North Germany for a full-day excursion to Berlin and back. The boat train proved to be far superior to the longer bus trip that I have taken in the past. On board during the nonstop journey, we were provided with at-seat service of food and drinks. The train reached the dank, Soviet-style Lichtenberg Station in former East Berlin and left from a spanking modern Spandau Station in suburban former West Berlin. I had the day to explore on my own and was particularly interested in finding the location where I had been arrested on spying charges for taking illegal photos during the tense week the wall went up in August, 1961. Success resulted, and next time I aim to locate the building in the Pankow district where I was incarcerated and forced to sign a bogus confession for East German propaganda purposes. It was that or jail, and the US had no diplomatic relations with the DDR then, nor did anyone know I was in Berlin.

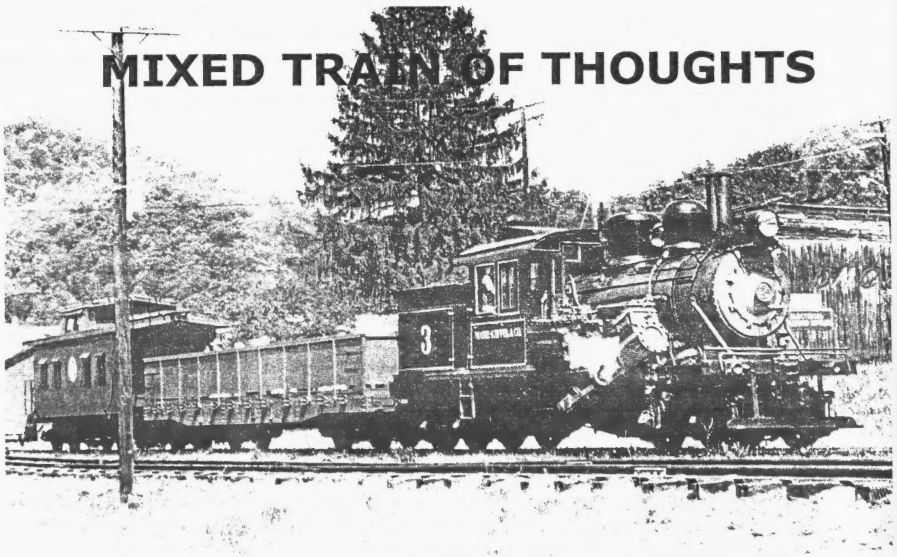
During the call at Copenhagan, we booked a day return to Puttgarten in Germany to be able to ride one of the last two European train ferries in operation. The four-car Danish trainset ran to the port of Rodby, where the complete train went aboard the train ferry deck for the over-the-water journey to Puttgarten. With shortened trains, vehicles now also share the rail deck, and as freight no longer operates via this route since the opening of the Great Belt fixed link, the rail yards at both terminals are now empty. The train ferry offers full dining, buffet and snack service during the 40min crossing. At Puttgarten, the train moved off the ferry to the station, then less than an hour later, a northbound train arrived from Hamburg and we made the return crossing and the ride back to Central Station. The only other passenger train ferry operation I am aware of is from the toe of Italy at Villa San Giovanni to Messina, Sicily. A bridge is planned to span the strait, but completion is about eight years away, and in the meantime the operation is far more intense than the Denmark-Germany link.

Disembarking in Oslo, I carried an Oslo Card for riding the trains and buses for two days, and to reach the airport, I used the station across from my hotel, where I chose the dedicated airport train (higher fare) over a local NSB regional train. Like the trains to Copenhagen's and Stockholm's airports, it is efficient and seamless and worth the premium fare of about $22.

August: Returning to Europe, I landed at Copenhagen's Kastrup Airport where I boarded a train for Gothenburg, changing at Malmo to have a look around. The line uses a tunnel, causeway and bridge to cross the Oresund between Denmark and Sweden. The line at first is relatively fast and then north of the port of Helsingborg, it becomes a twisty, wooded, scenic single track. Arriving at Gothenburg, I reached my hotel, the Scandia Crown, within 5mins on foot, and I spent two days in this architecturally interesting city.

(continued on page 22)

MIXED TRAIN OF THOUGHTS



The Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad operates the steam-powered Durbin Rocket over a former C&O line in eastern West Virginia. The Rocket departs from the Durbin WV depot and travels about five miles over the former Greenbrier Subdivision of the C&O southward towards Cass WV. This line was built from Ronceverte WV, on the C&O main line, 99 miles north through Cass to Durbin; however, the portion between Ronceverte and Cass was abandoned in the late 1970s. The 15-mile segment to Durbin was left intact and was used by the Cass Scenic Railroad for manyyears; however, it was severely damaged during a hurricane in Nov 1985 that caused massive washouts. The line was subsequently abandoned, but five miles were restored in the mid-1990s for use by the Durbin Rocket. Initially, the Rocket was diesel-powered, but in 2003 it was powered by a very rare gear-driven Climax steam locomotive. The engine still has its original No. 3. It was built in 1910 and was ued to haul logs from forests along the Middle Fork River for over 50 years for the Moore-Keppel Company of Ellamore WV. It now hauls passengers through scenic forests in eastern West Virginia. The Rocket will operate again this year on weekends starting in May. For more info, call the D&GV RR tollfree at 877-868-7245 or visit www.mountainrail.com. Photo by Alex Mayes.

The northbound City of New Orleans, train 58, on Apr 6 derailed as it was nearing Yazoo City, 25 miles north of Jackson MS. All nine cars derailed, and seven of them fell onto their right sides, leaving the engine not derailed and the last car upright.

The derailment happened as the train was about to cross the Big Black River, while it was on a concrete elevated approach about 10 feet above swampy ground. There were 68 passengers and 12 crew aboard. One passenger, a 68-year old woman from Chicago, was killed and many others were injured, some of them critically. Two crew members were among the critically injured.

The derailment happened on rails of the Canadian National Illinois Central Railroad. There was no immediate speculation as to the cause of the accident.

The consist of the derailed train was:

engine 82 (P42); baggage 1223, sleeping car 32036 substituting for dorm-sleeper, diner 38009, lounge 33013, coach-smoker 31592, coaches 34069 & 34087, sleeping car 32005 and deadhead coach 34135 from Beech Grove.

The southbound train 59 of Apr 6 was terminated at Memphis and turned to become train 58 of Apr 7, running from Memphis to Chicago, while the New Orleans to Memphis leg of train 58 of Apr 7 was cancelled.

The diagram on page 19 shows the position of the engine and first three cars after the derailment. All the other cars except the deadhead coach at the end were on their right sides.

The NTSB, beginning an investigation of the wreck, reported that the train had been traveling at 78mph in a 79mph zone. The engineer applied emergency braking at the time of the derailment. The investigators said he would be interviewed on Apr 8.

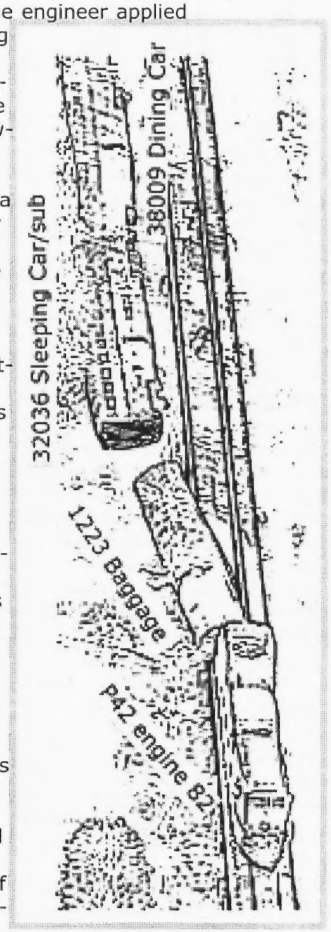
Some passengers told the media that the conductor had remarked as they traversed the rough track in the area, that "This is the worst part." Reporters then noted that several freight derailments had occurred on the five miles of "worst track" in recent years.

The day after the wreck, uninjured passengers remained in hotels awaiting their luggage

The fatally injured woman was identified as Clara Downs. Her husband told reporters that he was "disgusted" that Amtrak had not called him.

The question of sabotage or terrorism immediately arose, as rail systems were already on an alert due to a governmental belief that they might be hit by terrorists this summer. However, FBI officials said there was no evidence of terrorism in this incident.

The NTSB reported Apr 8 that the engineer had seen a misalignment of the track ahead of him and that he began braking. Then he saw the right rail "roll over" in front of him, and applied emergency brakes.



The CNIC Railroad cleared the tracks by 3am Apr 8, and the southbound City resumed operation from Chicago that day. It and the train of Apr 9 (Good Friday) were reported already sold out at that time due to the Easter weekend approaching.

One news station in doing a video of the wreck noticed that a length of rail was piercing the underbody of one Superliner car that was on its side, and emerging from the side of the car, then wrapping itself around the car. Their reporters didn't know what to make of this fact, but felt it might be some evidence of the condition of the track.

One tragic irony arising from this accident was the report that the deceased passenger always rode trains because of a fear of flying.

Late last year Amtrak was ready to reduce the senior fare discount from 15% to 10%, effective in Jan 2004, but dropped the idea before it took effect.

Concern with terrorists attacking rail facilities dated from Mar 11 when three terrorist bombs exploded almost simultaneously on commuter trains in Madrid, Spain, killing 191. Then on Apr 3 a bag containing explosives was found under rails of the high-speed Madrid-Seville line.

Westbound Sunset Limited that left Florida Mar 28 was delayed at Tucson AZ when brakes on sleeper 32071 did not release and set a fire under the car. The conductor and his assistant used fire extinguishers to put it out, but both suffered smoke inhalation, the conductor very seriously. He had to be hospitalized in intensive care.

Long Distance/Midwest Corridor Psgr Car Fleet Status 04/09/04

Equipment Type	Active	Required	Available	O/S	O/S
Superliner	431	311	331	100	23.2%
ICE Horizon	86	63	61	25	29.1%
Michigan Coach	4	3	3	1	25.0%
Amfleet I	12	9	8	4	33.3%
Amfleet II	141	115	111	30	21.3%
Viewliner	48	31	38	10	20.8%
Heritage Diner	23	15	17	6	26.1%
Heritage Dorm	22	15	15	7	31.8%
Total ICE Cars	767	562	584	183	23.9%

The above table shows the numbers and percentages of long-distance Amtrak passenger cars out of service following the derailment of the City of New Orleans. To illustrate reading the table, the first row shows Superliner cars having 431 cars active (on the roster), with 311 required for present services, 331 available, 100 out of service, for an out-of-service percentage of 23.2. Source: Amtrak.

Other data for Superliner & Hi-Level cars show a shortage of one smoking coach to fill current needs, a shortage of two Sightseer lounges and a shortage of seven transition dorm-sleepers. There are just enough coaches (83) available for current needs and just enough playroom coaches (4).

SERVICE	Operated	Late	On Time %	Goal
Acela Express	680	204	70.0%	94.0%
Auto Train	62	49	21.0%	70.0%
Ca Zephyr	62	37	40.3%	70.0%
Capitol Ltd	62	26	58.1%	70.0%
Capitols	696	63	90.9%	85.0%
Cardinal	26	10	61.5%	70.0%
Carolinian	62	54	12.9%	85.0%
Cascades	335	115	65.7%	85.0%
City of NO	62	5	91.9%	70.0%
Clocker/Keyst	643	126	80.4%	90.0%
C Starlight	62	48	22.6%	70.0%
Crescent	62	16	74.2%	70.0%
Downeaster	248	11	95.6%	85.0%
Empire Svc	721	174	75.9%	85.0%
Empire Builder	124	46	62.9%	70.0%
Heartland Flyer	61	16	73.8%	85.0%
Hiawatha	426	5	99.0%	85.0%
Hoosier	36	19	47.2%	85.0%
Illinois/MO	310	142	54.2%	85.0%
Lake Shore Ltd	124	58	53.2%	70.0%
Metroliner	285	93	67.4%	94.0%
Michigan	310	88	71.6%	85.0%
Pac Surfliner	714	74	89.6%	85.0%
Pennsylvanian	62	37	40.3%	85.0%
Piedmont	62	14	77.4%	85.0%
Regional	1671	379	77.3%	90.0%
San Joaquins	371	112	69.8%	85.0%
Silver Service	186	144	22.6%	70.0%
SW Chief	62	14	77.4%	70.0%
Sunset Ltd	26	26	0.0%	70.0%
Texas Eagle	62	20	67.7%	70.0%
Three Rivers	62	21	66.1%	70.0%
ALL	8737	2247	74.3%	85.0%

The table at the left shows Amtrak on-time performance for March 2004. The first line, for Acela Express, shows for example that of 680 trains operated, 204 were late, for an on-time percentage of 70, against Amtrak's goal of 94% on time. Source: Gene Poon, Amtrak.

• • •

A bizarre incident happened on the Boston MBTA's Haverhill line Feb 10 when a woman walked in front of a slowing train at Reading station and was clipped but not seriously injured. Local police arrested the train engineer when he would not produce a driver's license. Engineers are not supposed to carry their driver's licenses, which are irrelevant on railroads. He was released later without charges.

Heavy winter snows in the West affected the California Zephyr on Jan 1. Westbound train 5 derailed one coach at low speed because of a buildup of ice and snow along the rails on Donner Pass. This tied up the line for a time. UP had to bring out a flanger plow to clear the snow and there was shuffling of cars around, while no. 6 was also held. No. 5 reached Emeryville about 20 hrs late on Jan 2.

Amtrak will lose money on its on-board food operations as long as there are scams going on such as one that the company's Inspector General began prosecuting in March, in which employees were reportedly pocketing $500 a day by various crooked means. And two conductors based in Sacramento were indicted Mar 25 on charges of pocketing cash from on-board ticket sales over a period of two years, up to $24,000.

UP's Truckee CA yard has been purchased by Holliday Development of Emeryville. With input from Truckee officials, the company will work up a business/housing development there. The yard has been vacant since a lumber mill closed there in the 1980s.

Derailment update: Preliminary reports suggest that a tiny replacement piece of rail that came loose was responsible for the rolling over of a larger piece of rail, causing the City of New Orleans to derail (see p. 18).

Damage estimates of Amtrak equipment in the derailment are: engine 82, $50,000; baggage 1223, $55,000; slpr 32036, $2 million; diner 38009, $2 million; lounge 33013, $700,000; coach-smoker 31592, $700,000; coach 34069, $650,000; coach 34087, $350,000; slpr 32005, $215,000; coach 34135, $176,000. The $2 million estimates of two cars seem to indicate that they are totalled, while others said that the cars damaged at $650,000 or more are unlikely to ever be returned to service. In that case, Amtrak loses five Superliner cars permanently and three more temporarily.

News in this issue is updated through Apr 9, 2004. Contributors to this issue not otherwise identified include Robert Abraham, Howard Bender, George Danchisen, Glenn Lee, Gene Poon, Ray Saunders, Barry Steinberg, Ed Von Nordeck and Walter Zullig.

Amtrak has requested $1.798 billion from Congress for FY 2005. The White House wants to give only $900 million. (For the present year, Amtrak was granted $1.218 billion, compared to $1.043 billion the previous year, but less than its request of $1.812 billion.)

On Apr 8 Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) introduced bill S.2306, which among its features would create a commission to close down long-distance rail passenger routes.

Various legislation is being considered in Washington to provide money for rail security.

The Sunset Ltd will not run east of New Orleans on some days in April and May because of CSX track work. Affected are eastbd trains of Apr 11, 18, 25 & May 2, and westbd of Apr 15, 22, 29 and May 6 (Florida dates; these will start in N.O. a day later).

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"The Interstate system was sold as a savior for both rural America and declining urban cores; instead it speeded the trend toward suburbanization at the expense of both city and country. It was heralded as an antidote to traffic jams; instead it brought ever more congestion. It was seen as a shining example of progress and good government; by the 1970s it had helped sour Americans on the very idea of progress and good government. And who would have thought that better highways would help make us all so fat?"
—"The Great Paving", Fortune Magazine, Jan 26.

SLIP OF THE MONTH CLUB***

"Does the Auto Train have a separate dinging car for Sleeper passengers?"
—Question posted on an Internet railfan forum, Apr 2.
(Nah—they get dinged in the regular dining car.)

IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO READERS

During the past year RTN has been off its regular publication schedule, and this situation has worsened recently. The reason for this was a printing problem: our printing plates have become obsolete; during this time their availability went from difficult to impossible. Switching printing systems is extremely expensive and time-consuming, but we have finally made the switch to digital plates. Now that we are finally over that hurdle, we expect to be able to resume our normal publication schedule. We are sorry for this problem, and we greatly appreciate the patience of our loyal readers. We look forward to better times ahead.

RAIL FANTRIPS

May 7,8,9: Boston Trolley Meet. Holiday Inn Somerville MA. Sunday possible fantrip. Admission $12, banquet $29.95, both $39.95. Prototypes & models. Pre-register to Boston Chpt NRHS, Box 66202, Auburndale MA 02466-0002.

Aug 7-22: Colorado Adventure. Lv Boston Sc Sta on Acela to DC; Cap Ltd, SW Chief thru Rockies of Colo. Fares start $2200 coach pp dbl occ. Mystic Valley Rwy Soc, Box 365486, Hyde Park MA 02136 or www.mysticvalleyrs.org or 617-361-4445.

June 27: Connecticut Boat Train. Charter P&W train via Tafts Tunnel to MV Seapony at Norwich CT, cruise Thames River. Lv 10 am 75 Hammond St, Worcester MA, back 6pm. $45 RT. Mystic Valley Rwy Soc, Box 365486, Hyde Park MA 02136.

Send large SASE to addresses. One listing in RTN is free. It must give specific dates of operation. Write: Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709 or e-mail to rtn@trainweb.com

CARS & CONSISTS

***Ocean,** VIA train 15, Halifax NS Feb 21: engines 6407, 6429, 6421, 6424 (F40s); cars 8606 bag, coaches 8142, 8127, Skyline dome 8509, diner 8407, slprs 8210, 8229, 8216, 8212, 8209, coaches 8137, 8113, Skyline dome 8503, diner 8412 not in svc, slprs 8211, 8206, 8203, 8228, 8215, dome obs "Banff Park" 8703. Train has double set of equipt, as #15 of Feb 20 was cancelled due to worst snow storm in recorded history in Nova Scotia: 3 feet in 24 hrs plus 60mph winds.—Eric Hillyer.

***International,** train 364, Port Huron Apr 4: engine 36 (P42); cars 34062 coach, 35002 snack coach, 31007 coach-baggage.

***Wolverine,** train 350, Dearborn MI Apr 4: engine 35 (P42); cars 43361 cafe, 54011 & 54039 coaches, engine 33 (P42).—George Danchisen.

***Silver Star,** train 91, Newark NJ Mar 14: engine 651 (HHP-8); cars 1145 bag, 2505 "Pacific Forest" crew/dorm, 62016 "Lake View" & 62049 "Winter View" Viewliner slprs, 8502 diner, 28009 "Albany Club" smoker/dinette, coaches 25109, 25105, 25010 & 25036.

***Crescent,** train 19, Newark NJ Mar 12: engine 944 (AEM-7AC); cars 2517 "Pacific Skies" crew/dorm, 62008 "Eagle View" Viewliner slpr, 8512 diner, 28010 lounge/dinette, coaches 25085, 25116, 25077 & 25005, bag 1730.

*Metroliner train 117, Newark NJ Mar 12: engine 924 (AEM-7AC); cars 44967, 21280, 21710 business coaches, 43356 full dinette, 44957 & 44921 business coaches, 48974 full 1st class/dinette. Same, train 210, Wash DC Mar 14: same cars as #117 above, but AEM-7AC engine unknown (it left too fast to get the number).—Jim Langan.

2004 New England Railroading Calendar—25th edition features 12 8x10 full color prints plus 2 cover pages @ $8 postpaid of frameable calendar pictures (our choice) 12/$3. Domestic orders only. Mystic Valley Railway Society, PO Box 365486, Hyde Park MA 02136-0009. Allow 2-4 weeks delivery. www.mysticvalleyrs.org

WANTED & NEEDED: Fellow rail travel advocates who could distribute "Save Amtrak" leaflets in the states of CT,DC,IN,KY,MK,MA,MS,NV,ND & UT. I have master copies. You ask, I send. Also, while riding Amtrak, if you spot Amish people, ask for names and addresses, especially PA. I have friendly literature for them. Lastly, postcards from AR,CO,DE,GA,HI,ID,IL,KS,KY,LA,MI,MN,MS,MO,NH,NC,TN & WI, & snapshots of Cleburne, McGregor, Austin & San Antonio TX stations and the Mexican mountain with a big cross on top. Thanx. I pay. Merlin L. Marlowe, PO Box 45, Wilber NE 68465.

12 Months of Training 2003

(continued from page 17)

A Gothenburg Card allowed full access to the city's extensive tram, bus and ferry operations, and on the final morning I boarded a train for the ferry terminal and the three-hour crossing via the Stena Danica to the Danish port of Frederickhavn. It is a bit of a hike to the station, and not well marked, but schedules are so well coordinated that there was immediate boarding for the Danish train over a scenic country line to Arhus, Denmark's second largest city. The small first-class section was located at one end of the train, and the conductor set up a complimentary supply of juice and bottled water. Happily, I was advised to make a seat reservation because the train was sold out in both classes.

The Arhus station was packed on a Friday afternoon, and once outside, I found the Scandia Plaza Hotel opposite the station and offering single bedrooms, a rare feature now in the US. Following a two-day visit, I boarded an Arhus to Copenhagen train for the relatively fast run via the Great Belt Bridge. One set of the train originated at Arhus and another came in from the north to couple up. Upon arrival at Central Station, my wife was seated on a platform bench directly opposite the door where I detrained.

Later in August, my wife and I traveled from London Euston to Liverpool Lime Street to visit that city, Birkenhead, the Lever Brothers company town at Port Sunlight and the major seaside resort of Black-pool, with its impressive trams. Using the Virgin Trains Website before leaving the US, I secured for my wife a one-way London to Liverpool ticket for 11 pounds, another from Stockport to Maidenhead for the same amount, and then picked up the tickets at a Euston Station ticket machine. Standard class fares run from 11 pounds ($20), 14-day advance purchase, up to a walkup fare of 85 pounds ($153). I was traveling on a BritRail Pass.

After two days in Liverpool, we traveled from Lime Street via Manchester Picca-dilly and the newly improved travelator connection between the through tracks and the terminal tracks and on to Levenshulme to visit a retired medical missionary I had worked with in East Africa some 42 years ago. Then on a Sunday, my wife headed to Heathrow Airport, and I made my way via Virgin IC125 train operating from Inverness to Newquay, one of the longest and most delightful runs in the country. The line is simply wonderful, following the Channel from Exeter to Teignmouth, again after Plymouth crossing the Tamar via Brunel's mid-19th Century suspension bridge and finally winding through the hilly terrain in Cornwall.

After two days visiting friends at Porthleven on the Cornish Coast, I took an IC125 train to Exeter St. David's and booked into a B&B just up the hill from the station. Then returning to the station, I boarded a local train for just one stop to Dawlish Warren on the River Exe and walked along the highly popular seafront path between the railway line and the English Channel through Dawlish to Teign-mouth. This was something I always wanted to do, enjoying trains whizzing by to one side and dodging the surf crashing against the breakwater on the other. When the rail line dives through tunnels, the footpath leaves the tracks and takes a delightfully circuitous countryside route inland up hill and over dale back down to the sea for the final mile or so into Teignmouth.

On day two, I rode a train to Paignton then took a Paignton and Kingswear steam train over the former British Rail Line to Kingswear opposite Dartmouth with a ferry connection across the River Dart. The steam train was full, and with a gentle rain the engine had a very slow time of it, slipping numerous times while climbing the ridge, with the one-hour trip taking an extra half-hour. At Kingswear, I walked the coastal walk, then rejoined the steam train for Churston and took a bus into Brixham for a coast walk via Berry Head back to the steam train to Paignton and train to Exeter. On the final day, I took a First Great Western IC125 over the scenic high-speed line to Reading for the 50min bus connection to Heathrow. The IC125s, when refurbished, are still by far the most comfortable coaching stock in the UK.

September: On a visit to Britain, I continued a newspaper research assignment to write up a series of hikes that can be taken from railway and Underground stations. Two of them took place in Wales. Taking an IC125 from Paddington over the

former Great Western Railway and through the Severn Tunnel, I chose Newport as my base, finding a bed and breakfast within 10mins' walk of the station. On the day I arrived, I dropped my luggage and boarded a Crewe-bound train from Newport a short distance to Pontypool and then walked about ten miles along the hillside Monmouthshire and Brecon Can to Llanfoist, where it was two miles down into the Usk Valley to Abergavenny station for a train back to Newport.

On the second day, I rode an IC125 west to Swansea, then took a two-car diesel MU via a Y into Carmarthan and on to Tenby, a beautiful Pembrokeshire town perched above the sea and its small harbor. Collecting a picnic lunch and water, I walked the coastal path, along the beach for the first few miles, then up on the headland, swinging back to Penally. I had to flag the train for the short run west into Pembroke Dock, then stayed aboard for the return to Newport, with the train ultimately bound for Manchester Piccadilly.

As earlier this same day I saw that the Newport to Southampton train I would take the next morning was standing room only leaving Newport, so because of my luggage I elected to take an earlier train west to Cardiff to then board at its originating station. This worked well and the ride via Bath, Westbury and Salisbury is delightful. The train arrived at Southamp-ton on time for my connection to the Queen Elizabeth 2 for New York, traveling aboard as a lecturer.

October: I took my first Boston to NY Acela trip on a Friday afternoon, boarding the Quiet Car at South Station, which to my delight maintained virtual silence for the entire trip. The train filled by Providence, but it was the uneven speed that I noticed the most. There is a sensation of speed out of Boston, then again after Providence, but from Westerly it seemed no faster than a normal train, perhaps partly the result of the sophisticated suspension. Then from New Haven to New Rochelle it was very slow with numerous stops and starts, and 20mins late into Penn Station. The whole operation is a letdown in terms of promised speed and reliability. If Amtrak doesn't make it on the NEC, what hope is there for any real progress across the nation?

November: For a Thanksgiving visit to Philadelphia, my wife and I elected to use NJ Transit and SEPTA rather than Amtrak, as the round trip for two costs the same as an Amtrak one-way fare for one. The downside is the one-hour longer journey each way and the possibility of missing the connection at Trenton, losing another hour. The train at Penn Station filled to standing room only, but years of experience got us aboard well before it became packed. We were late into Trenton, bu SEPTA will often hold the train, and did We then did not move at all for about 2(mins while Amtrak regular trains and holi day extras passed by, and the SEPTA trai arrived at Market East about a half hou late.

For the return, there was no problen making the NJ Transit connection at Tren ton, but from there the train was muc delayed because of an accident investiga tion on the tracks. We bypassed three sta tions, forcing some passengers to back track from Rahway. Announcements wer very poor, inaudible or non-existent, espe cially when passengers had to walk for ward to detrain at short platform stations We arrived at Penn Station 45mins late.

December: I was back in England an made a Dover-to-Calais Cross-Channel tri on a Sunday. Taking the car, we heade along the coast to find the portal for th Channel Tunnel trains. One popped out a we approached the Frethun station, th interchange between the Eurostar and th SNCF line to Calais Ville. The trains n longer run to Calais Maritime for ferry con nections to England, and of course there are no direct train connections at Dover Instead, a bus transfer operates to an from Dover Priory. Dover Western Docks station is now a cruise ship terminal an the tracks are gone.

Then on Dec 15 I was aboard the fa miliar line from Waterloo to Southampton Central, the train calling at Woking, Win chester and Southampton Airport Parkway The last leg was a short taxi ride to the Queen Elizabeth 2 for New York.